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Whose Agenda? Bottom up Positionalities of West African Migrants in the Framework of European Union Migration Management

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Abstract

This paper discusses the position of West African mobility in light of the migration and development debate, and particularly the stance of the European Union (EU) on migration as being caused by failed local development. We hereby follow critical scholars who have highlighted that African migration is still seen as a 'development problem'. From this starting point, we point to incoherent dimensions of EU migration-development policy-making. Subsequently, we use Sheppard's notion of positionality to embed the discussion on West African mobility within a wider debate on West African livelihoods as bottom-up processes of globalisation. In so doing, we unbound the question of development beyond the territorial boundaries of a locality. However, these processes lead to new frictions. To further illustrate this, we dive into two empirical cases from Ghana and the Republic of Gambia that enable us to better understand how different positionalities lead to different kinds of values and interpretations regarding the development question. Our suggestion in the conclusion is to maintain such a pluralistic viewpoint on the migration-development relations and to follow more closely the frictions and synergies in these relations.

Keywords Africa, mobility, trajectories, transnationalism, migrants, development, nexus.

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SNAPSHOT 1:

In January 2016, I, Joris Schapendonk, visited Pastor Bob, a Ghanaian leader of a Pentecostal church in Amsterdam. During our small talk over tea, he gives me a flyer concerning a new initiative, with the sub-header: "For a sustainable, better future, back home." The initiative provides a one to three month training programme for undocumented migrants, which helps to prepare them for a 'sustainable return' to their countries of origin. The flyer guarantees "protection against detention" and includes a powerfully written text on hope, fear related to a life as an undocumented migrant, and new horizons. The little European Union (EU) flag at the very end of the flyer gives a hint as to where the money for this initiative has come from: The EU Return Fund, with an annual budget of €645 million. A call, a week later, to the NGO indicated on the flyer reveals that the basis for the programme has since shifted. Now, as the friendly lady on the other end of the line patiently explained, the Dutch repatriation service, the Dienst Terugkeer & Vertrek (DT&V), is the principal funder. This makes the church of Pastor Bob somehow liaised to the restrictive migration policy of the Dutch government.

SNAPSHOT 2:

During a visit to the northern part of Ghana in late-October 2017, a mutually befriended local academic brought Lothar Smith in touch with a local NGO, which had the terms 'development' and 'migration' in its name. Thereby, the request from both the academic and this NGO was to look critically at a draft proposal that sought to gain funding for the development of a so-called 'village of hope'. In this project, returnee migrants (originating from northern Ghana) would have the chance to slowly integrate into local society again and, thereby, also re-invigorate local livelihoods. In addition, the proposal sought to minimise the influx of irregular migrants to Europe, and other cities in Ghana, through various different kinds of sensitising programmes that would discourage young people from leaving the region. For both sub-programmes, the underlying rationale was to make young adults aware of the scope for a local livelihood versus the dangers of migration. The proposal built on work conducted over the last 10 years to dissuade local youngsters from engaging in dangerous forms of

migration, through radio talk shows, drama and video documentaries. Funding for this initiative was sought from the German Federal Government.

Introduction

What defines the parameters of policies oriented towards migration, in conjunction with development? The prior two snapshots were taken from ethnographic fieldwork conducted over the last 10 years in Europe and various West African countries, such as Senegal, the Gambia and Ghana (more details to follow). They help to capture the complexity of the relation between, on the one hand, human mobility as it arises out of livelihood strategies of households and communities¹ and, on the other hand, explicated concerns of states with these movements, both in Africa and Europe. A general distinction is often made between key policy concerns of migrants' countries of origin and recipient countries. The increasing importance of bilateral and multilateral agreements between African and European states to 'manage' migration problematises this distinction to a large degree.

It is important to note that many of these migration agreements stem from the EU's Global Approach to Migration and Mobility (GAMM). This policy approach is characterised by an "external dimension" of migration management that includes both securitisation measures to curb unauthorised migration from Africa, as well as development initiatives that address the so-called root causes of migration in order to prevent outward migration. The Emergency Trust Fund, being one of the major outcomes of the Valetta Summit that brought together African and European leaders in November 2015, is one of the latest developments in this respect. Through such agreements, the EU gains further foothold in the West African region in its quest to stem unwanted migration (Trauner & Deimel, 2013; Andersson, 2014). There are two major consequences of the GAMM. First, the EU border shifts further southwards with, for instance, EU border control missions close to the Senegalese coastline in 2006-2007 and, more recently, in mobility hubs of the Sahel, with Agadez as the most notable place for border interventions (Molenaar et al., 2017).

A second major consequence is that the substantial funds available – development funds in particular – open up the field of migration management

to a whole range of actors in Europe and Africa that are all eager to play a role, not least because of the money that can be earned from their involvement. Thereby, migration has become an economic niche that finds itself increasingly commercialised and professionalised through the establishment of an ever-expanding migration industry (Gammeltoft-Hansen & Nyberg-Sorensen, 2013; Cranston et al., 2018). The overall trend is an increasing diversity of actors operating in the tripartite relationship between migration, development and securitisation (Nyberg-Sorensen, 2012). At times, this has led to unlikely pairings between actors, as in the case of the first snapshot above, in which a Pentecostal church became an actor in a deportation continuum emanating from subcontracted alliances between state apparatuses and civil society actors in the Netherlands (Kalir & Wissink, 2016). Furthermore, with regard to the second snapshot, Andersson (2014:52) carefully unpacks the development aid induced “food chain” to show how, in hierarchical order, international institutions, Western NGOs and local initiatives all share the same objective of addressing the root causes of migration. Critical scholars, however, have pointed to the sedentarist logics behind these preventive migration measures, as these initiatives mainly emerge in order to ‘keep people in their place’ (Bakewell, 2008; Nijenhuis & Leung, 2017).

In this paper, we contrast the logic of the EU’s migration-development policy agenda, with the bottom-up development dynamics that derive from processes of migration. In so doing, we unpack the manner in which migration is contextualised in transnational networks, giving impetus to the role particular places can play, yet also acknowledging the contingency on government policy frameworks like GAMM. This raises issues of ‘positionality’ (Sheppard, 2002), which may result in friction during the enactment of translocal developments by migrants and their counterparts (Grillo & Riccio, 2004; Zoomers & van Westen, 2011).

To help explain these processes, we will refer to two empirical cases that highlight the various ways West Africans position themselves in a globalising world in which mobility opportunities become increasingly polarised (Bauman, 1998). The first case resulted from fieldwork conducted during the

2002-2015 period, initially through the multi-sited Ghana TransNet programme (Mazzucato, 2000; Grillo & Mazzucato, 2008), which studied the economic influence of transnational networks linking Ghanaian migrants in the Netherlands with their counterparts in the rural Ashanti Region of Ghana (Kabki, 2007) and Accra (Smith, 2007) on local economies. In subsequent years, annual visits to Ghana allowed for further explorations of this data. The second case is based on a four-year (2014-2018) research project that aims to follow the dynamic and fragmented mobility trajectories of West African migrants to and within the EU. For this project, fieldwork is conducted in several European countries as well as in the Gambia.

The two cases enable us to better understand new opportunities and dependencies emerging in transnational spaces, and what role migration may play therein. Based on this discussion, we conclude by emphasising the need for pluralistic viewpoints on migration-development relations, specifically in policy development, to better adhere to the reality of the role of migration in developmental processes. First, however, we frame migration-development as an inconsistent policy field in the framework of the EU's migration management approach. Subsequently, we briefly sketch a variety of West African positionalities in times of globalisation to embed discussions on migration within a wider globe-spanning field of power relations.

The Complex Logics of The EU's Migration-Development Approach

The GAMM is the EU's comprehensive policy approach that serves as an overarching framework of EU policy regarding migration and asylum. Although this policy framework is seen as a direct response to the Arab Spring in 2011, its existence has a long history that can at least be traced back to the Vienna Action Plan in 1998. This action plan launched a concentric circle approach to migration management, consisting of three circles. The inner circle presents the EU Schengen zone, the second circle is the European neighbourhood and the third circle consists of 'migrant sending countries', located primarily in the Global South. As a major follow up, and particularly after the border events by which migrants climbed the fences of Ceuta and Melilla, the European Commission launched the Global Approach to Migration

(GAM) in 2005 (Eisele, 2012). GAM further articulated the EU's objective of managing migration flows by means of 'genuine partnerships' with third countries. In 2011, GAM evolved into GAMM, an expanded policy framework that addresses both questions of migration and mobility. GAMM is founded on the following four pillars:

- 1) Better organisation of legal migration and fostering well-managed mobility;
- 2) Preventing and combating irregular migration;
- 3) Maximising the development impact of migration; and
- 4) Promoting international protection and enhancing the external dimension of asylum.

Development, as a policy ideology, is prominently present in two of these four pillars. While development is articulated as a tool to prevent irregular migration in pillar 2, it is simultaneously framed as a positive effect of migration in pillar 3. For pillar 2, it is important to note that irregular migration is directly and indirectly framed as the undesired outcome of persistent poverty and underdevelopment. Subsequently, the argument can be made that there are no longer legitimate reasons for people to migrate when poverty has disappeared. Such reasoning is not only empirically problematic, as is made clear with the so-called 'migration hump' theory (de Haas, 2010),² but it also shows that development as a policy field becomes aligned to all manner of harsh border controls and strict asylum regulations. As a result, the nexus of security-migration and the nexus of migration-development merge in reality (Nyberg-Sorenson, 2012).

Pillar 3 subsumes a rather different set of policies, namely those focusing on the role of migrant remittances to help (co-)development in regions of origin. It is repeatedly stressed that these remittances outnumber official development cooperation and, over the last decade, migrants have thus also been warmly welcomed as important development agents, partnering the state and the more 'traditional' cooperation NGOs in the field of development cooperation (Netherlands Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2008).

Fascinatingly, these two pillars derive from an opposing logic regarding the relationship between migration and development. Pillar 2 starts from the notion that development policies must aim to improve the socio-economic situations in the sending regions, to help people stay in places of origin (more development = less migration). Pillar 3 implicates a policy vision that migration has a positive impact on development processes (more migration = more development) (Schapendonk, 2013). It is important to see how these policy logics are difficult to reconcile, making the policy field of migration-development extremely complex (Eisele, 2012; Trauner & Deimel, 2013).

According to the European Commission, the four pillars of GAMM are of equal importance. While on paper this is true, as there are no sub-divisions made in the presentation of the four pillars, we may question whether this reflects the reality on the ground. To illustrate this, we can unpack the financial structure of the EU's Emergency Trust Fund for Africa. At the time of writing (June 2018), the Emergency Trust Fund totalled EUR 3.39 billion, of which the largest share – EUR 2.98 billion – comes from the European Development Fund (EDF) (European Commission, n.d.a). With this money, the Trust Fund aims to achieve conventional development goals, such as the creation of greater economic opportunities, strengthening the rule of law and making communities more resilient. When we look at the actual projects being implemented under the header of 'Inclusive Economic Development', it is interesting to note that development questions are strongly linked with restrictive asylum and migration policy that includes deportations (European Commission, n.d.b). For instance, the Youth Empowerment Scheme in the Gambia, being funded with EUR 11 million, aims to reduce "migration pressure by improving the skills and employability of potential and/or returning migrants." There have already been reports on protests of returnees in front of the IOM office in the Gambia, who feel that the IOM promises of development back home have not been fulfilled.

Next to 'inclusive development programmes,' the Trust Fund is also put in place to "improve migration management in countries of origin, transit and destination." It follows that development money is used to develop "sustainable policies in the areas of security, justice, migration and border

management.” For the West African region, this has led to the training of national security forces and border guards in Burkina Faso and Niger, and the reinforcement of a data transmission system on security issues (European Commission, n.d.a).

In the context of the latter, Niger, and in particular the city of Agadez, is seen as a main point of EU intervention in their combat to fight irregular migration. While, trans-Saharan mobility from this particular place to Libya has been an age-old phenomenon, it has become increasingly criminalised in recent years (Brachet, 2018). In line with this, the European Trust Fund has started financing anti-smuggling campaigns in this West African mobility hub, which indeed lowered the number of travellers passing through Agadez. Recent reports based on community surveys in Agadez, however, show that about 70% of the respondents see EU-induced anti-smuggling measures as harmful to the Agadez community. Moreover, adverse economic impacts have been noted, which go beyond the actors that transport migrants across the Sahara. Bus companies, money transfer agencies, taxi drivers and vendors of food and water, among others, have all experienced negative consequences of these EU interventions in their daily lifeworlds (Molenaar et. al., 2017). Thus, the European Development Money is not only spent on practices that curb unwanted migration, but may also have devastating effects on ‘development’ processes on the ground.

West African Positionalities in a Globalising World

Migration cannot be addressed in isolation from other flows that mark the impact of globalisation on the world, at various scales. For this reason, we need to put bottom-up processes of West African migration within a broader framework that is sensitive to the position of West Africans in processes of globalisation. Linking up with processes of globalisation can be both a blessing and a curse, and in many cases it may be both. This is, for instance, reflected in the re-fashioned notion of the so-called ‘resource curse’ (Collins, 2016), whereby the global political-economy continues to push countless Africans into the margins of the economy and lessens their prospects for development. How many? They are quite literally countless, as many African states still have

weak databases for aggregating measures of income and growth, partly because of lively informal economies (Jerven, 2013). Yet, we can say more about the processes they are subjected to, such as the impact of exploitative mineral industries (e.g. Behrens et al., 2007), large-scale land grabbing (e.g. Zoomers, 2010), systems of corruption (e.g. David-Barrett & Okamura, 2016) and an overall persistence of neo-colonial relations (e.g. Dekker, 2017). Such messages create a somewhat dystopian picture of Africa as the ‘lost continent’. Other perspectives, notably those focusing on Africa’s position in global economic developments through analyses of macro-economic data, suggest a somewhat brighter perspective. Thus, one message, picked up by media around the world, argues that “six of the world’s ten fastest growing economies of the past decade are [located] in sub-Saharan Africa” (The Economist, 2013, data taken from the World Bank). Our position is that both extreme viewpoints should be avoided, especially when these follow deterministic conceptions of development. Instead, we argue that it is much more relevant to better grasp how people in various parts of West Africa, both urban and rural, are able to navigate the uncertain, partially-globalised economic world of which they have become a part (Vigh, 2006).

To further understand this, we use Sheppard’s (2002) notion of positionality as being a position in a relational time/space within a global political economy that both shapes and is shaped by processes of globalisation. Positionality, in other words, reflects the “transnational topology of power” (Ferguson, 2006: 89). This also helps to move us well beyond redundant analyses of Africa as a homogeneous continent. Rather, we speak of multiple positionalities in a framework of globalisation. We thereby particularly stress how powerful global systems – like the EU’s migration management apparatus – produce margins that still leave room for manoeuvrability (Simone & Pieterse, 2018). We provide three examples of such positionality here that directly or indirectly relate to processes of mobility and migration.

One example of such positionality comes from ‘forex’ bureaus, which are omnipresent in West African cities. Whilst on the surface they provide a simple service – allowing their customers to exchange local with foreign currencies or vice versa, taking a small profit from the exchange – their role is key. They

enable their customers – be these traders, travellers, local businessmen or everyday citizens with paid jobs – to not only engage in commercial activity with business partners elsewhere, but also to deal with currency fluctuations, thereby smoothing their income flows. This remains of vital importance, particularly in the informal economy (Osei, 1996: 28; author's (Smith) own field observations, 2004-2016).

Another example of such positionality comes from Bolay's (2017) work on artisanal gold diggers in the West African region. Within a highly exploitative supply chain, the artisanal gold diggers create spaces of "social inversion" and an "ethics of luck" through their informal practices and mobility tactics:

The ethic of luck at play in everyday work may also contribute to the attractiveness of mining spaces for the alternative hierarchies, identifications and sources of social value it facilitates [...] Of course this view falls within the set of representations that structure gold mining micropolitics and do not mitigate the conflicts and exploitation that takes place in the sector, although it may bolster the appeal of mining spaces beyond purely economic explanations (Bolay, 2017: 137).

While these gold miners seek to find ways to invert a highly exploitative system in their own favour, many others initiate bottom-up processes of globalisation. Indeed, in these contexts, linking up has become the pathway towards social-economic progress. This is illustrated by the third example coming from Ceesay's (2016) compelling ethnography of two types of 'hustlers' in the Gambia.

The first group of people are the 'beach boys' who are looking for 'a connection' with tourists from the Global North in Gambian tourist spaces. The second group are online hustlers, locally known as chanters, who establish online relationships and have different 'itineraries of accumulation' through their 'love methods' (Ceesay, 2016: 49). While the first actors in Ceesay's study have a defined geographical space to look for global connectivity – a space locally known as the 'industry side', i.e the coastal zone, where tourism is visibly present – the second group of hustlers find their ways through virtual space.

Interestingly, Ceesay positions his study in an environment of involuntary immobility (Carling, 2002), as many of his informants express the aspiration to move out of the Gambia (also see Smith, 2015; Prothmann, 2017). While European policy makers see this outward mobility mostly as a problem from a border management perspective and seek to understand this mobility as a 'failure of development', these would-be movers perceive mobility as the shortest route to improve their lives and those of their families. Cross-border mobility can then be best understood as a process of 'globalisation from below' (Mohan & Zack-Williams, 2002), as it opens up an entire new field of connectivities. However, as we will indicate below, these connectivities may also lead to new frictions.

Translocal Development and Friction

Since linking up seems to be an important strategy for West Africans in light of processes of globalisation, we suggest applying a translocal development lens, as is introduced by Zoomers and van Westen (2011). Building on relational geography and a Sennian development approach, the translocal development perspective unbounds the notion of local development by paying better attention to the connections and mobilities that transcend the local levels. In other words, this translocal perspective is particularly helpful in unpacking the geographical complexities of migration and development (Benz, 2014).

The concept of translocal development, however, does not only account for specific synergies that catalyse development impacts. It also explicitly refers to specific frictions within the same processes. Friction, as a concept, may refer to the processes or factors that hamper and oppose mobilities (such as border controls, distance and surveillance), as well as the encounters in our mobile world that may have profound effects in creating new societal directions. In both instances, the work of Tsing (2011:19) is of vital importance, as she introduces the concept of friction as follows: "As a metaphorical image, friction reminds us that heterogeneous and unequal encounters can lead to new arrangements of culture and power." Friction, therefore, does not only emerge due to tensions between sedentary policy initiatives that aim to keep people in their place (Bakewell, 2008), on the one hand, and cultures of mobility in West

Africa, on the other. It may also appear within bottom-up development practices that create specific moralities and expectations, particularly concerning the relationship between migrants and their communities back home (Raghuram, 2009).

Before we present our empirical cases, it is worthwhile to put in perspective the value of connectivity in understanding how translocal developments may come about. Thereby, we focus particularly on remittances as a phenomenon that has often been seen as an important tool for development. With the volume of migration of Africans to destinations within (Bakewell & Jonsson, 2011) and outside the continent (de Haas, 2007) increasing, one might also expect a concomitant increase in the volume of remittances sent. While in absolute terms, increases in remittance volume have indeed been recorded, African migrants send home far lower amounts of remittances, at least through official channels, than their compatriots from Asian and Latin American countries of origin. According to the World Bank's Migration and Remittances Fact Book (2016), there is only one sub-Saharan African country – Nigeria – that makes it to the top-30 of remittance receiving countries. When more relative numbers are taken into account, such as the share of remittances as a percentage of the GDP, then two West African countries appear in the top-ten remittance-receiving countries. These are: Liberia and the Gambia. While this observation certainly points to the importance of migrant money for these particular national economies, these numbers do need to be put into perspective to avoid feeding a particular discourse that sees remittances as the new panacea of development. For one, not a single country receives remittances without also being a remittance sending country at the same time. For instance, whilst remittances do make up 24% of Liberia's total GDP and are crucial to the functioning of the country's economy (World Bank, 2016), what is too often ignored is that Liberia is also an important remittance-sending country. According to the same World Bank records, the outflowing remittances from Liberia are approximately 18% of the same GDP. Second, it is worthwhile to remember that just France and Germany, with a total population of roughly 150 million, already receive more remittances than the

entire sub-Saharan Africa region, which houses a total population of 970 million people (World Bank, 2016).

The divide in these numbers makes clear that Africa's international migrants who make it to some part of the Global North are in a less favourable position than migrants coming from other parts of the world and/or may have little urge to invest in their countries of origin. These insights, however, should not be taken to suggest that the journeys of African migrants to other regions of the world are without value. Rather, it helps to understand how, despite the precarious nature of many of their journeys and the scale of investment required to reach the Global North, they are still able to remit home.

A final critique on remittances as a resource for development cooperation concerns the still-prevalent idea that remittances are non-contextual flows of monetary funds that can be simply be tapped into, or 'harnessed', by governments of countries to fit their development agenda. This ignores the core reason for the very existence of these remittances: they resulted from the decision of individuals, alone or with their families, to engage in migration as the best way to secure savings with which to then achieve specific goals. Hence, while migrants often also exhibit a certain commitment towards their home countries, their migration, as an economic project, is primarily intended to benefit themselves and their immediate social circle (Schapendonk & Smith, 2008). The ways in which these remittances are fraught with complexities will become clear in the following two cases, with particular focus on how remittances are contextualised in social relations across transnational space and how their meaning is further defined and refined by local actors and the locations they become immersed in. The first case dives into the social dimension of remittances in Ghana and approaches the transfer of money as part of intertwining personal agendas. The social dimension re-positions the development-induced morality regarding investments in migrant houses, which is mostly seen from a policy perspective as a mere consumptive form of remittances. The second case dives into the ways mobility trajectories of individuals are inherently related to each other and how this creates different dependencies along paths of movement. These two cases are used to reveal essential linkages between human mobility and developmental incentives in

transnational contexts, which may help to redress the current emphasis in policy development on non-mobility solutions through 'development at home' programmes.

Case 1: the Morality of Migrant Investments in 'Mansions'

Migrants across the world invest in houses in their countries of origin. Such investments form a considerable part of the total flow of remittances sent home by migrants (Massey et al., 1998; Henry & Mohan, 2003; Seitinger, 2003). This is not without reason, as the desire to own a house remains one of the primary reasons for migrants, notably those who are lesser-skilled, to migrate in the first place. Yet, this inclination of migrants to invest in houses is often considered problematic by policy makers, as well as some academics. Sinatti (2015) explains this issue using the case of Senegal. Her research shows how governments of countries of origin seek to lure their foreign-based nationals into investing back home. Thereby, the frustration lies with the ability to redirect the remittances they send away from 'satisfying consumptive needs', towards supporting all manner of 'real' economic goals. Sinatti (2015:91) notes that "[m]igrants are described [in government circles] as 'simply hoarding savings or [...] putting their money into anarchical socio-economic constructions' (Diatta and Mbow 1999:253)." Osili (2004) contests this government perspective in an analysis of the propensity of Nigerian migrants based in the United States to invest in houses, concluding:

Housing investments may be the first stage of a broader investment relationship between migrants and their countries of origin. Institutional knowledge gained through housing investments in their community of origin may be applied toward a wide set of investment objectives, particularly where home family and home town association networks mitigate some of the risks associated with investing in the home community (Osili, 2004: 844).

In the context of Accra, Ghana's capital city and the site of repeated fieldwork conducted by Smith in the period 2002-2015 (Smith, 2007), these points help us to reconsider the traction of the debate on the desirability of such

transnational investments, as related to their 'productiveness' in a local economy in the long run (Black et al., 2003). Smith and Mazzucato (2009) argue that the legitimacy of this concern primarily rests on the level at which this impact is considered. Thus, a macro-level analysis may conclude that the same capital could have been invested more profitably in a range of other economic activities, whether rural- or urban-based. Yet, this analysis would not take into consideration the effects of these remittances at a micro level, and would fail to provide answers to questions directly related to these investments, such as: Why? How? And why there? These are crucial questions as they help to unravel and explain the rationale behind migrant investments, the transnational arrangements through which these are achieved – given the physical distance between the migrant and his/her investment – and what is in it for all parties involved.

Clearly, investments in houses implies making investments in transnational relationships, which are complex, multi-directional arrangements across vast physical space. To this end, an analysis focusing on the actors involved can help explain the exact value of investments from a personal perspective. In other words, remittances need to be understood as the result of intertwining personal agendas. These agendas can result in a multi-directional flow of money, goods, ideas and persons across the globe, whereby each remittance transaction has a defined purpose. Insight into the development of transnational engagements, often over extended periods of time, between actors at two different ends of the world, helps unravel the role of particular institutional norms and rules, as well as the trust that is produced and reproduced in relations. Additionally, the location and moment in time (which is also related to the life-stage of those involved) of investments, as well as the the room for manoeuvre available to actors to give their own meaning to the purpose of remittances is underscored.

Remittances are nearly always contextualised, personified outcomes of choices that migrants, and those with whom they engage, make to help achieve projects of an individual or communal nature (Åkesson & Baaz, 2015: 72). The link between development and notions of inclusion, is understood only by studying the personal transnational spaces and lifeworlds in which these

remittances are embedded. Macro analysis of remittance flows cannot see this, simply because of its focus on aggregate numbers. It is true that, for remittances, these numbers are impressive, so it is not hard to understand the lure of them. However, such aggregate numbers are irrelevant. For instance, a large city in the Global North, looking for ways to find funds with which to finance a major overhaul of its public transport system, might be keenly eyeing the total amount of savings held in accounts in local banks, but obviously these are not theirs to use. For remittances this also holds true.

All in all, Case 1 illustrates the morals attached to remittances by policy makers: they perceive remittances as a potential channel for addressing developmental issues (DfID, 2005; Orozco, 2006) and will continue to eye migrant investments in houses with distaste, as wasted consumptive investments.³ Thus, they will ignore how these investments can actually help create a conducive environment for the same migrants to also invest in other sectors of the local and national economy.

Case 2: Timing 'Development' - Multiple Dependencies Along the Migrant Pathway

The second case is part of a research project that follows the so-called trajectory approach in migration studies (Schapendonk et. al., 2018). This methodological design is meant to follow individuals along their pathways of movement on the basis of longitudinal ethnographic engagements. This connection with informants over time allows the ethnographer to use the same methods (interviewing, observations and informal conversations) in the different places the mobile informants pass through. In the framework of this itinerant methodology (Bolay, 2017; Schapendonk, 2017; 2018), I, Joris Schapendonk, had the chance to visit the places of origin of some of my Gambian informants whose mobility trajectories I had followed for some years in Europe.

Although I had heard many stories about the Gambia from my informants, a field visit to their places of origin enabled me to better understand the relationship between 'home' and 'away', as well as the relationships between

my informants and their relatives and friends 'at home'. The case presented here is also situated in the translocal space connecting Europe to Serekunda and to a village in the North Bank region of the Gambia. It binds together the stories of two Gambian brothers, Dawda and Yahya, and the story of Dawda's best friend Alagie (for the purpose of this research, pseudonyms are used). Following the migration of the two brothers, Alagie had taken up the role of broker to deal with family issues on behalf of the two brothers, and engaged with them in business-related matters. Interestingly, as Smith (2007) also earlier found in the Ghanaian context, migrants often do not rely on family members for streamlining their investments and remittances in this transnational space. The role of broker, however, also gave Alagie the opportunity to move to Europe on a tourist visa, as we will learn later.

In terms of their migration profile, the three men differ considerably. The oldest brother – Dawda – moved to Europe ten years ago and for a time was working as a security guard in the tourism sector. During this period, he started a relationship with a Dutch lady. This relationship granted him formal access to the Netherlands. In this particular country, he now has a stable job, a house and a rather rich social life. After he broke up with the Dutch lady (also the mother of his oldest child), he married a Gambian woman. She came from the same village of origin and recently joined Dawda in the Netherlands. They now have one daughter together. His ability to attain a 'stable life' in the Netherlands has also impacted the village where he came from, as Dawda financed projects, such as the construction of a so-called "line-house", consisting of six living spaces that house some of the villagers.

Dawda's younger brother, Yahya, took a rather different path. In 2013, Yahya embarked on his trip to Europe, taking the 'backway', the dangerous crossing through the Sahara, to reach Libya. On the way, while in Niger, he received money from Dawda, which enabled him to continue his journey. This situation is common for many migrants moving along this trans-Saharan route, as the costs and risks of travel often far exceed estimations made beforehand (Belloni, 2016). When Yahya finally reached Italy, he entered the asylum procedure. This resulted in a fragmented legal status: he obtained two short-lived documents, in between which he underwent a period of undocumented-

ness. Notwithstanding his precarious situation, he still felt an urge to start sending money home once he had spent a year abroad. However, his brother advised him not to do so. Dawda stated:

He asked me, "should I send money home now?" I said, "Nooooo! Tell them you are searching for papers, tell them you are still suffering. Keep the money. Save it for the travel" (Conversation with Dawda in the Netherlands, September 2014).

The third Gambian man, Alagie, only stayed in Europe for three months. Dawda had arranged an official invitation through the Embassy for him, which resulted in a three month valid tourist visa. This somewhat surprised Alagie as he had gone through the same process before, yet with a rejection as the result. From a Gambian perspective, the visa system of EU countries is little more than a lottery system (Piot, 2010; Gaibazzi, 2014). As a friend of Alagie put it:

The visa system is gambling. You can try thirty times without no luck, but you can also get it after one shot. But if you don't get it, they don't give you back your money. So they make business, it is a gambling business (Conversation with Amadou in the Gambia, September 2017).

Alagie returned to the Gambia according to his visa conditions. There, he runs a gym and a shop, both financed by his good friend Dawda. Seeing the two businesses, I remembered how Dawda had, over the years, bought all kinds of second hand gym equipment and machines, filling various containers with these and other goods that he sold in the Gambia through his friend Alagie. Where both businesses had been flourishing before, Alagie noted how the supplies were drying up lately:

At this moment, I think Dawda has no money. He has his own family that he needs to take care of first [...] And, of course, he spent so much money on the village, and he spent too much money on the backway projects of his brothers, so his money is dried up now (Conversation with Alagie in the Gambia, October 2017).

Indeed, on various occasions, Dawda explained that he had felt the need to financially help some of his young relatives who had decided to try their luck

at migrating to Europe. Now, Alagie is feeling the negative consequences of this. In turn, his own social network is also feeling the repercussions of this, as he has found it increasingly hard to send the usual monthly amount of 1000 Gambian Dalasi [around 17 Euros] to his mother in Senegal. Seeking a way to improve this situation, he is once again assessing his chances of reaching Europe.

A synthesis: Notes on Migration and Development

The two cases illustrate that we cannot fully understand the role of remittances in development processes without taking into account the positionality of the migrant. In this light, Raghuram (2009) rightly asks the question: what, and whose, development do we speak of when we discuss the relation of migration to development? Whilst the first case discussed a more general phenomenon that we see in many places across Africa – migrant investments in houses – the second case gave first-hand insight into the multiple interdependencies produced in the trans-world of migrants. These dynamics underscore that any attempt to ‘territorialise’ development impact provides a one-sided and limited picture of the widely discussed migration-development relation (Zoomers & van Westen, 2011; Nijenhuis & Leung, 2017). Moreover, a viewpoint stressing ‘local development impact’ would reproduce the notion that development always works in only one direction, from North to South. By contrast, both cases show that we could better frame ‘development’ within a “force-field of relationalities” (Ingold, 2011:93), in which social-economic transformations linked to migration need to be understood as flowing in multiple directions simultaneously. Within this force-field, each individual has a different positionality which, in turn, creates all kinds of values and interpretations of what is seen as good and bad, worthwhile and redundant.

These manifold interpretations can create all kinds of frictions in the transnational worlds of migrants, producing new dependencies and burdens. Indeed, it is for this reason that many migrants seek ways to escape the moral questions of development back home. However, frictions can also be productive when they provide some kind of grip on global connectivity (Tsing,

2011). They may result in new societal directions, in affirmations of particular social institutions, and create incentives that may be much more sustainable because of the hard questions asked about their meaning and impact. This is in line with relational thinking in human geography (Massey, 2005) and anthropology (Ingold, 2011), as well as development literature that follows a Sennian approach. Furthermore, we also avoid a 'fixing' of development, an approach that reduces the question of development to specific, bounded geographical entities, be they singular places or regions.

In this context of interdependency, we can attempt to understand the reasoning behind Dawda's advice to his younger brother to invest further in his migration trajectory, rather than send remittances to his family back home. It is paramount for migrants to time investments in countries of origin correctly to mitigate the social pressure that may arise thereafter for them to send more money (Smith, 2007). Not only are many migrants not in the position to send back money on a regular basis, they may actually also still be receivers of support from their families, notably during the more difficult stages along their trajectories (Belloni, 2016). Yet, in the discussion of remittances, we focus mainly on the direction of financial flows from the developed to the developing world. In line with earlier arguments in this article about the macro numbers, we plea for a more critical look at remittance flows that takes into consideration how money flows involving migrants are embedded in translocal spaces. This also takes both the inflow and outflow of family money, as well as other kinds of investments (such as time and other resources) into account. Then, we are able to draw a more nuanced picture of remittances as the motor for development (Schapendonk & Smith, 2008). Most importantly, this perspective also helps us move away from the one-sided, but dominant, policy notion that development is there to reduce migration (Bakewell, 2008). In line with this, it is striking that the UNDP report of 2009 (UNDP, 2009), which suggests the need to lower barriers to migration, has rapidly fallen out of grace. This could be a sign of political unwill, but also of continued misconceptions of how people construct their livelihoods and therein give significance to places.

Conclusion

This paper began with a critical discussion of the EU's approach to migration and development that is biased towards the notion that development may be used as an important tool to halt migration. We contrasted this policy ambition with the bottom-up processes of globalisation, by which West Africans seek ways to participate in processes of globalisation. We highlighted the multiple positionalities at stake in these processes. This pluralist starting point moves away from both optimistic and pessimistic viewpoints of the global future of sub-Saharan Africa. In our view, and here we follow de Haas (2010), the relation between transnational migration and development should be understood, assessed and positioned within the same pluralist perspective. This argument is more than simply admitting that we have reached the end of grand narratives in social science. It is, instead, a plea to follow social and economic impacts – i.e. the frictions and synergies – carefully. Only then can we see that remittances can be both productive and consumptive (as emerged from the Ghanaian case). We may also be more sensitive to the multiple directions of monetary transactions as well as the social conditions, interdependencies and power relations in which remittances are grounded (as illustrated by both cases). Moreover, this approach enables us to scrutinise the logics of development projects that are inherently related to the securitised migration control agenda of the Global North (as exemplified with the case of the Village of Hope in Ghana in the Introduction). Thereby, we are also better able to understand how some migrants, like Pastor Bob in Amsterdam, have become an integral part of the same restrictive migration policy agenda.

Thus, we hereby claim that it is far more productive to analyse how different trajectories of migration and different development potentials intersect with and counteract each other, than to preconfigure an analytical approach along the lines of either the migration-development optimist or migration-development pessimist camp (de Haas, 2010). As so many theorists have argued, globalisation in general, and transnational migration in particular, intensifies interdependencies in our world. This statement should then also inform our research methodologies and help to redirect the current sedentary orientation of migration and development policies towards intersectional,

actor-relevant directions. For it remains striking that the money of migrants is generally valued for its positive development impact by governments in both the Global North and Global South whilst the migrants themselves encounter more and more barriers, many imposed by these same governments. Ultimately, potential migrants, as potential bottom-up enablers of improved livelihood opportunities through transnational configurations, are even prevented from leaving their places of origin under the same 'development' banner. This may well spread further the general feeling of involuntary immobility (Carling, 2002) and even global abjection (Ferguson, 2006) among African youth. Many Africans recognise how affected they are by globalisation, but find themselves unable to capitalise on their own position in these flows, and thereby their say in them, through their own mobility. Irrespective of the success of policy measures to actually contain people, we seriously question whether in the long run these policy measures are truly effective and/or morally sustainable. Why is it that a survey in Agadez indicates that 70% of the local population sees negative effects of EU projects subsumed under a development fund? Why is it that nobody seems to talk anymore about lowering the barriers to movements, as suggested by the UNDP report of 2009? From our viewpoints, the answer lies in the fact that the development agendas of state apparatuses and the development agendas of people practicing bottom-up processes of globalisation are worlds apart.

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Notes

¹ This is a relation entailed in the work of scholars of the New Economics of Labour Migration School, and in pluralist approaches to livelihood studies. See de Haas (2010) for an overview.

² In short, the migration hump theory suggests that a rising level of household income may actually induce rather than reduce migration. Indeed, it is only when a certain level of wealth is achieved that households become indifferent to opportunities elsewhere and migration rates may decline (de Haas, 2010).

³ In the same vein, Bracking and Sachikonye (2006:5 in Bracking & Sachikonye, 2010:206) explain how, particularly in politically volatile countries, such as Zimbabwe during the last decade, remittances can provide much of the money needed by urban households to pay for everyday consumables.

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